

MIDTOWN ZONE IS BIG BUSINESS AREA

Skyscraper Development in Grand Central District Ex- ceeding Downtown Locality.

FACTOR OF ACCESSIBILITY

Many More Building Changes Pre- dicted by Irwin S. Chanin in the Near Future.

Forces very similar to those which created the first skyscrapers in lower Manhattan are irresistibly working in the development of a region of tall buildings in the Grand Central zone and Forty-second Street areas of midtown Manhattan, explains Irwin S. Chanin in reviewing some of the recent operations in those localities.

Early in the present century business expanded rapidly, he points out. Many new lines of business came into existence. There was a great demand for office space in the locality agreed to be the important home of big business. Tall buildings followed rapidly as the demand for space continued. Now, according to Mr. Chanin, building in lower Manhattan is virtually coming to a standstill because it is almost impossible to assemble plots suitable for large enterprises. But the demand for space continues and business is steadily moving uptown.

"One prime reason for this movement," says Mr. Chanin, "is the increasing difficulty in reaching downtown offices. Traffic conditions and a changing mode of life are responsible for this. Our typical big business man now lives in the Park Avenue district, in Westchester County or on Long Island. From Park Avenue, the Grand Central Terminal, where he leaves the trains from Westchester County, or the Queensboro Bridge which brings him from Long Island to Manhattan, he must go downtown by taxicab or private automobile slowly through congested streets. His only alternative is to join his clerks in the shorter but more strenuous subway scramble.

"The Grand Central zone's most valuable ally in the future will be this increasing difficulty of travel to a district which has become widely separated from railway terminals, hotels, clubs, theatres and such important centres as the garment, fur, furniture, millinery and jewelry industries. Retail shopping, theatre and hotel districts have moved northward not once but two or three times.

"When the first skyscrapers were being built downtown, those centres were moving from Fourteenth Street to Twenty-third Street. From Twenty-third Street they moved to Thirty-fourth Street and from Thirty-fourth to Forty-second Street. Now they are on their way to Fifty-seventh and Fifty-ninth Streets. Most of our smart shopping is done on Fifth and Madison Avenues in the Forties and Fifties.

"The continued development of the Grand Central zone is further assured by the fact that whereas there is now little opportunity for further development west of Madison Avenue or even on Madison or Park Avenue there is a highly absorbent outlet on Lexington Avenue, where there must be marked activity for four or five blocks north and south of Forty-second Street. Lexington Avenue is a through street and capable of handling a large burden of traffic.

"Another factor that assures the continued development of the Grand Central zone as a business centre is the fact that a great part of Manhattan's important apartment building is grouping itself within a few blocks. Tudor City, Sutton Place, First Avenue, Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue in the Fifties are the sites of many new apartment houses and apartment hotels. Here there is a reciprocal condition. More places in which to live and walk to business insure a continued demand for office space in that location.

"At the present time five buildings which will be larger than the five largest buildings in the financial district, are completed, nearing completion or in course of construction in the blocks bounded by Lexington Avenue, Madison Avenue, Forty-second and Forty-sixth Streets, all more than thirty stories in height. They are the Graybar Building, now complete, the Chanin Building and the New York Central Building, nearing completion, the Lincoln and Chrysler Buildings upon which work began recently.

"The Grand Central zone soon will have a skyline which will eclipse in fame that of the original skyscraper district. The downtown skyscrapers were pioneers. Most of them antedate zoning systems. They occupy full lot areas and are built without setbacks. There was little reason, when they were built, for making them, architecturally, much more than enclosed cubic feet of space.

"The zoning system has changed all that. The Forty-second Street skyline is one of individual towers rather than a mass of buildings. It has encouraged the architect to lavish upon their exteriors a degree of effort which has been rewarded with the development of a purely American architectural form, called into existence to meet a peculiarly American condition.

"Thus in the Grand Central zone office buildings are being constructed which make the skyscraper one of the distinctive forces in the economic development of America."